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**STATEMENT ON 2005 NATION'S REPORT CARD™ RESULTS
IN READING AND MATHEMATICS**

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The 2005 Nation's Report Cards for reading and mathematics give us a new look at how well American students are learning two of the most essential skills necessary for future success. And improvements, especially in math and among typically lower-performing student groups, are encouraging.

In evaluating this progress nationally and among the states, it is important to examine results for different student groups collected in the NAEP sample. As our country becomes increasingly diverse, so too do student populations, which vary both between states and over time. As a result, achievement data and trends should be interpreted as a reflection of changing demographics as well as school effectiveness.

For example, since the beginning of these assessments nearly 15 years ago, the size of the Hispanic student population in particular has more than doubled nationally. Over half the states have seen the number of Hispanic students they serve grow exponentially; one in particular has had a seven-fold increase. So we are delighted to see that nationally and in many states, those students are registering both short- and long-term achievement gains across the board.

(more)

It seems that increasing percentages of students are developing the math foundation they need in elementary and middle school to participate in high school math and science courses. That is a very good thing, and it is important that we continue to improve our math performance to be competitive in the 21st century's knowledge-based economy so focused on technology.

In particular, the higher and lower performing students at grade 4 are showing solid progress, and the gap between the two groups has closed by nine points since the assessment was first administered in 1990. Although the eighth grade gap between high and lower performers has not decreased over the same timeframe, both groups are on an upward trend, and that's also positive news.

But as a former English teacher, I am concerned that we are not seeing similar movement in reading scores. In fact, the higher performing readers in both fourth and eighth grades haven't made significant improvement since the first assessment in 1992.

It is important to get students off to a good start in their early years, but that is not adequate for sustaining and improving results at the higher grades. We have laid the groundwork for further learning, and we should be pleased by the growth indicated at grade 4, especially among the lower-scoring students, who have gained 12 points since the 2000 assessment.

However, the educational system is not making similar progress in literacy up to the end of middle school, and that should be of great concern to everyone. It is no secret that in the wake of electronic media and short attention spans, the role of reading in American culture is on the decline. We must all encourage our young people to read. It needs to be emphasized across the curriculum in the higher grades and outside of the school building, not just in English classes.

It is important to keep in mind that illiteracy isn't the only issue. As a nation, we must also ensure that the next generation of adults has developed the higher-level reading skills necessary for success in an increasingly technical workplace.

As our nation and states become more and more diverse, and the differences between states' demographics vary dramatically, we as a country have to figure out how to educate children from all kinds of backgrounds and circumstances. One of the real demands facing schools is providing the right services for this diverse population in order to adequately prepare them for pursuit of the American dream. But while the gaps between the various student groups are still large, it is encouraging to see that the narrowing of those gaps is headed in a positive direction.

In conjunction with the National Center for Education Statistics, the Governing Board has been hard at work to improve these reports and make them more accessible to more people. As chair of the Governing Board's Reporting and Dissemination Committee, I am excited about our new release website and the enhanced access to this kind of data that it provides to educators, journalists, and the general public alike.

I encourage everyone to visit www.nationsreportcard.gov to learn more about the capabilities of this new user-friendly tool that we hope will provide greater understanding about what America's students know and can do in subjects like math and reading.